

I've Got it Bad (and That ain't Good)

by Talktidy

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Summary: Sarek gets to grips with Terran music.

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Early in Sarek of Vulcan's diplomatic career, he was assigned an initial placement on Earth. He did not prosper.

He was new to the diplomatic service and beginning to think his talents might be better fitted to a different career. The miserable climate taxed him, and if human illogic tried his patience, then their noise, much of it what they had the effrontery to call music, was utterly insufferable.

It embarrassed him that Ambassador T'Shaal herself had noted his discontent. Although he had done his utmost to fulfil the requirements of the post, Terrans confounded him, and that lack of comprehension could not but impact on his job performance.

"One comes to know a race through its culture," T'Shaal told him.

"I have heard you express this opinion before, Elder, and I have endeavoured to follow your advice. I must confess, however, I find the exercise has offered no illumination." Indeed, in assiduously following T'Shaal's recommendation, he had elected to visit the Uffitzi, which encompassed one of the more influential, more assertive traditions of Terran art, and met a blank wall of incomprehension. He found the figures and events depicted in paint on canvas baffling. Aside from the illustration of things he did not recognise nor understand, allegory formed a large portion of their narrative, but was conveyed in a manner too oblique. Yes, he could consult the appropriate references and decode intended meanings, but the constant necessity wore on him.

He disclosed his failure to T'Shaal, thinking she would regard this as a further indication of his unsuitability to remain in her service, but T'Shaal only offered that perhaps the visual arts was not the best place to start.

"You have a particular appreciation for music, Sarek. You might consider our host's approach. The composition, \_Summertime\_, I find of particular interest. You might start there."

Music? Inwardly he winced, careful to allow none of his dismay to register, but he was trained to obedience and so consider \_Summertime\_ he had.

A brief search on the embassy's databanks revealed it was composed by George Gershwin for the 1935 opera \_Porgy and Bess\_, lyrics ascribed to DuBose Heyward, author of the novel on which the opera was based. His understanding again foundered on Vulcan expectations, astonished to discover at least seven hundred different recordings of the song in the embassy's records alone. A sampling of fifty recordings revealed a widely varying style in each recording. If seven hundred amazed him, then he knew not what to make of the realisation that this number was a mere sliver of the thousands of recordings in existence.

For one song.

So un-Vulcan.

Vulcan owned no heritage of gathering in bands and orchestras. Historically, only a warrior leader might have afforded the water debt to amass so many in one place, but such antecedents would have put their resources into armsmen. As Vulcans eschewed violence and embraced logic, a governing aesthetic emerged of an individual musician playing for an audience. Rarely, an accompanist might provide further texture and colour to a harpist or flautist. Vulcan compositions were almost wholly contemplative in nature. In contrast, Terran music, a great deal of it anyway, was rambunctious and that so much of it should feature brazen declarations of a desire for a mate, or even to mate, appalled him. He cast an eye over a description of another piece: \_I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)\_ which offered an exemplary case in point. At this juncture he shut down his workstation.

Over the following months, T'Shaal demanded he attend her at various music concerts in furtherance of his musical education. On a particularly fraught evening, he had been subjected to the Shostakovitch 11th Symphony. The volume had hurt his ears and how anyone could regard a church bell as a musical instrument escaped him. What disquieted him more, perhaps, was that his heart might beat to a different rhythm than that of these Terrans, but, even so, the beat of a martial rhythm kindled within him a frame of mind tinged with contention. That performance had quite demanded he meditate for the next seven point four hours to regain his equilibrium. The whole experience meant he slept little that night.

He put T'Shaal's persistence down to T'Pau's wishes behind the scenes. He continued to perform his duties to the best of his abilities, however deficient he suspected their execution, waiting for the time when reality engaged with his family's desires and the

inevitable call came to return home.

One day T'Shaal transported he and several colleagues to England, to Kings College, Cambridge. The age and history of the institution fascinated him; he would have preferred time to explore rather than be submitted to yet another round of cacophony, but T'Shaal was determined they explore Terran musical culture in all of its expressions and choral singing appeared to be next on her list.

From references to travel visas, exchange visits, T'Shaal was well acquainted with the Director of Music. They had been afforded an opportunity to hear the final rehearsal of a piece for a concert to commence forty-eight point four hours later. He considered work piling up on his desk and suppressed an un-Vulcan urge to fidget. Experience warned him he would be too distracted for any useful thought afterwards. He took his seat next to a fellow aide.

Nothing had prepared him.

Skeins of crystalline sound lofted up into the chapel's vault and stole away all desire to breathe. A soprano sang, true and clear, soaring above her fellow choristers in a lilting, weightless tone no female Vulcan could ever follow or match.

An alien, transfixing beauty that stole away his breath.

\_Miserere mei, Deus\_. \_Have mercy upon me, O God.\_ He knew most choral singing in this context was to the glory of a supernatural being. He had expected to be assailed by emotionalism and so he was. Yet he didn't care. Entranced, stunned, moved, he remained in his seat long after the choir's last notes had ebbed and faded. What mattered it that following this he would require an extended period of meditation, and the work on his desk would not be addressed? His control must have betrayed something of his disordered thoughts, for it seemed T'Shaal was well satisfied with her work.

"Now you see," she said.

And he did.

A door had been opened for him; in the process of a few minutes, Terrans went from a species for whom he could barely summon patience for their transgressions of logic, to one that aroused a cautious fascination.

Some thirty three years and twenty two days later, another choir sang Allegri's \_Misere\_, but the performance was aimed to please another. His gaze sought out his wife, Amanda, who listened spellbound to the complex weave of harmonies.

Amanda felt his scrutiny and gave him a fond smile, then riveted her attention back upon the singers, entranced.

In the intervening years Sarek had gathered a greater understanding of what it meant to be entranced by mesmerising beauty, how subtle, how effortlessly insidious the allure. Some things one could start off discounting, but they might come to be something one needed in one's life as essential as air.

Sarek has long come to accept he's got it bad, but on the whole he

would dispute that it ain't good.

The End

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Unlike Sarek, I am not at all sniffy about the Shostakovitch 11th; it is one of my favourite pieces of music. Feedback rings my bell any day.

End  
file.